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PRISONER AMONG THE INDIANS.

It was not at all like a prison van, but ample, sufficient, and convenient, "with kitchen, parlor, dining-room, and chambers all complete," like the doll's house of the nursery-rhyme, if somewhat like that, too, in magnitude, with sofas and reclining-chairs, the luxuries of the larder, all the appurtenances of toilet and table, and deft personal service, and the captor and tyrant lurked unseen, unsuspected.

So we went gaily into the wilderness, seeing only the wide, rich plains, with a cabin here and a cottage there ; now and then a dusky face watching the train, now and then a plow upturning the fertile furrow ; and ever the long lines of iron rail on a turfed and even bank—stiff, straight, slender lines shooting from the horizon, leading all the world's skill and thought and patience of hope and labor of love for a thousand years, into the heart of the wilderness, to a people without a history. And, suddenly, lurid clouds drop low over the plains, threatening, to the uninitiated, tornadoes and the sudden extinction of *our* history, but to the experienced eye of the scoffer representing only the unsentimental outskirts of a sand-storm in Texas !

Along the horizon of the gloaming we are girdled with fire, and between it and us are fences of fire, fierce and beautiful, among which and past which we sweep unharmed.

"That is what becomes of the prairie grass," says the Master of Horse, with unsmothered disgust. "There are 300,000 acres of it burning up, and the cattle perishing for want of food !"

The ignorant ranch-less opens wide eyes of astonishment and inquiry, and the battle instantly begins.

"Every blade of that burning grass is needed for the cattle. They are dying for the lack of it. Texas has dried up. Yes, it belongs to the Indians, and they cannot sell it, but they have a right to rent it, and it was hired from them in good faith and with

their full consent. They were doing nothing with it. No one was using it. They were glad to let the cattlemen hire it, either at so much per head or so much per acre. The renting of their land brought in to the Indian Government \$200,000 a year—\$13.50 per capita. Their right to rent it was not, perhaps, exactly guaranteed by the last Administration, but it was certainly so confirmed that there was no doubt of their right to make the contract. We had eighteen thousand cattle feeding there. One man's share in the plant I know was \$80,000. Gone. Hurt the land? No. Helped it. Improved the land, helped the cattle-owners, put money into the Indian hands, hurt nobody. Oh! a few of the lazy head men among the Indians, who were trying to get hold of the money themselves and could not, but saw it going where it belonged, to the honest working people, revenged themselves by interfering, made complaint, and Government interposed, revoked the action of the preceding government, or, perhaps I ought to say, ignored it. Without the slightest regard to their rights or their fate the cattlemen were ordered off. They were ordered to drive away thousands of cattle and nowhere to drive them. The Texan plains were dry. Here were food and water, and nowhere else. Prairies that are fed out don't burn out, but these were given over to fire and not food. Time was asked, but refused. Lands had been fenced in at great cost but they had to be sacrificed.

"But is there not another side to it?" asked John Halifax, Gentleman. "Is it not an opening for the white man to come in to the Indian Territory, and, when he is in, will it not be hard to dislodge him? The Indian owns his land, but only while he occupies it. If he is allowed to rent it, the white man gets an opening wedge,—the shrewd and unprincipled, as well as the honest,—and they burrow in, and screw in, and stick in, like a wood-tick,—to use a simile of the territory,—and make as great an inflammation upon the body politic, and the first you know you have an Indian war upon your hands."

"Not a bit of it. There is nothing to kindle war, nothing to incite war. The Indians want the cattle. It is not in the nature of an encroachment, it is in the nature of a contract. It is not made between man and man, it is made between cattle companies and the Indian Government. They contract of their own free will and get this money for their schools and their courts from lands which are not cultivated, which would otherwise run to

waste, which do burn up, as you see. The very Indians that gave in to misrepresentations, and went against us, see their mistake now and want us back again ; but it is too late. The ranches are broken up. The cattle have been driven here and there, and many of them have died. You will find Indians enough. Ask them about it. See what they say themselves. Ask Mr. Hewitt ; he is a Democrat ; and see if there is any partisanship or politics about. You are not going to benefit the Indians, or conciliate them, or civilize them, or teach them economy by taking two hundred thousand dollars worth of their property and burning it up before their eyes. You can keep out the law-abiding white man who goes there honorably and openly for traffic ; but that does not keep out the law-breaking white man who goes there scoundrelwise to cheat and steal and sell bad whiskey !”

I shudder. I fear that I am going to be interested. I feel myself becoming interested. I do not wish to be interested. I have come to the wilderness to be wild. I long to be, for a season, purely savage ; to be a mocking-bird, a deer, a partridge, a panther—anything that does not think and does not care ; a part of the swamp and the sky. They call cultivated strawberries tame strawberries here. I wished not to be a tame strawberry, but a wild strawberry ; a child of the jungle and not of politics.

Vain hope. Down in the wilderness I am sevenfold more a child of politics than in the cities. For, suddenly, here is a whole new set of politics. I find myself face to face with things which I had always heard of indeed, but only heard of. They were practically as remote as the grass-lands in the hanging gardens of Babylon. Now I tread the turf of another time, another race. A mysterious stream, flowing from what source I know not, descending through ages and continents of conjecture, washes now against my feet. I see its sparkle in the sunshine, I hear the ripple of its unhastening course, nor is wanting a gray sullenness beneath menacing skies, the growl of an obstructed flow, the “melancholy, low, withdrawing roar” of a helpless ebb. I find a nation within a nation ; the Anglo-Saxon nation, strong, advancing, controlling, cherishing, surrounding, irresistible : the Indian nation, surrounded, struggling, resolute, rising, suspicious, defiant. It sees the white government powerful and beneficent, white men teaching, civilizing, Christianizing.

But it sees also white men with faces gleaming greed and hands twitching for fight, impatient to enter upon a vast, rich, a forbidden possession,

“ With wolfish eyes
Waiting to see me die.”

At home, on the Atlantic shore, I could settle “the Indian question” at the breakfast-table, between oranges and coffee, without a misgiving, and without the slightest friction between plan and execution ; I have settled it a hundred times. But, here on the spot, great, grave questions spring from the hills, lurk in the woods, shoot athwart the streams, blaze up on the prairies, stretch from Earth to Heaven ! Panther and wild-cat and startled deer go their ways with the beasts that perish, and I cannot go with them. Human souls stand without at the gate, knock at the doors of the mind demanding to be admitted, demanding that their claims be presented, because they are human beings, children of our Father in Heaven.

The Prohibition Law exists in fullest force in the Indian Territory, both by Indian law and United States Treaty law. The whole legal power of both nations is bent on keeping whiskey away from the Indians and out of the territory.

“ And is it really kept out ? ”

“ They swim in it ! ”

We go to “town.” There are no streets. The buildings stand anywhere, askew. A few cabins, a few decent cottages, all very small, some with little attempts at decoration. There is no sign of what Massachusetts would call a town ;—only a few small, faded, shabby business buildings scattered around in the dust, the few small dwelling houses scattered around in the pasture. There are no roads. There can be no roads, because a man may fence wherever he will within a certain distance of his neighbor’s fence ; and what is a road to-day may be barred by a four-foot fence to-morrow. So the wagons are made to fit the country and the Government—made, I should say, to ride equally well upside down and right side up. Certainly that is the way we seem to be going. Four mules draw us untiringly, not to say friskily—sidling into a gully, jolting over a stump, dashing down a terrace, whisking around a corner, barking against a tree, pitching into a hollow, splashing across a “hog-wallow,” then a crash and

a splintering, and one mule is dancing out at right angles with the rest, and all jumping different ways, and we bump along somewhat more energetically, and I don't know whether it is a part of the performance and to laugh, or an accident and to scream, for it is only a little wilder jiggle, a little harder bounce against the tree trunks ; but I see that the Commander has taken one set of lines, while the driver keeps the other, and both are pulling with all their might, and I am inclined to think that things do not always go thus and that it is a runaway ; while a philosophical little lady, always philosophical, and with a turn for investigation, begins, with scientific dispassionateness, "Carl, why do Bessie and Jack take that peculiar gait ?" and suddenly we are brought to a standstill, and the drivers leap out and the barn doors of the wagon are flung quickly open and the passengers bidden and brought afoot out with marvelous celerity, and then I see that we were on the brink of a catastrophe and ought to have been scared, but it was only a very slight exaggeration of ordinary charioteering in the Indian Territory !

Our objective point is an Indian home—a trim little cottage in the woods, quite in the woods, a tiny lawn with flower-beds in front, neatly marked with white-washed rounded large pebbles. I have a misgiving as to my reception. Will not Madam Squaw surely divine that I have come out of curiosity, and will she not resent the motive and resist the act ? She emerges from her front door and advances lightly and erect down her straight path to the ambulance, the Dougherty wagon, the upside-downer—Oh ! comes she in peace or comes she in war ? thumps my guilty, cowardly heart, and lo ! it might be a Scotch woman fresh from the heather, or a Vermont farmer's wife, slender, energetic, self-reliant;—abundant, soft, light brown hair, a face keen, almost sharp, light fair complexion, blue eyes, dress of the country farm, neat and simple, and an air not merely of complete self-possession, but of recognized authority and command. My squaw is certainly a woman of parts and power.

She is full of hospitality and welcomes us as one who is glad to see us and to converse with her peers where peers are few. She has well defined ideas on all subjects—morals and manners and politics, laws and newspapers ; the mutual duty of the United States Government and of the Indian Government ; their sins of omission and sins of commission. The Marquis of Hartington is not

more proud of his blood. She recounts but casually her kin of high degree and the height of their degree and their estate. Her grandmother rode in her own carriage at Washington and ate State dinners at the White House. A Senator of the United States is her cousin. Scotch and American are in her blood, but "I am a right smart of a Cherokee, too," she declares with laughing insistence. All the reticence of the Indian is submerged under the Scotch-American inflow of blood and outflow of talk.

I am not more eager to ask than is she to convey information. She is intensely patriotic and political. Her sons, one a Senator, and her daughters, sit by interested and sometimes amused, and listening always to their mother with manifest affection and respect. She is unquestionably chief and *Matriarch* in her own family, and amply and easily fills the position. Like her the sons show no stronger sign of the Indian than their abundance of rather auburn hair. They are half-breeds, but might travel through the most inquisitive New England village without being suspected.

Their house is well furnished—carpet, books, pictures, parlor organ, vases. If I felt at liberty to investigate, no doubt I should find somewhere a frieze of defunct sun-flowers, a dado of cat-tails, some Japanese fans and a portiere.

"The Indians are coming. Don't you hear their warwhoop?" cries one next day at my chamber door.

I put on my war-paint and go down. Indians again! The Princess Pocahontas, dark, but comely, tall and strong and commanding, and with a gayety of heart, certainly with a gayety of address destructive of the Indian ideal. Gayety of dress also—a bonnet, upspringing in conventional yellow efflorescence, to the exact appointed height, and of the tint to match her brunette stateliness, figure becorseted and bedraped and begloved as faultlessly as if Worth had had the making of her, as he did, for aught I know. And the Young Brave beside her, dark, handsome, courteous, in Prince Albert coat and everything else as princely, might well have turned the heart of any Hanoverian princess of them all, were not the English heart already preoccupied by the more congenial charms of Buffalo Bill. Accompanying them, a veritable Fair One, with Locks of Gold—palest gold—a blonde maiden and no Fairy—no Indian either, but the daughter and the granddaughter of missionaries who have accompanied these Cherokees in their outgoings and incomings for generations—from

Georgia to Tennessee, from Tennessee to the Indian Territory, in South Carolina and in Florida ; whithersoever these wanderers fled, thither fled with them the beneficent missionaries, feeding, teaching, guiding, consoling, sustaining. And as I observe the delicate pale face, the crowning corn-silk hair, the soft refinement of costume, the gentle cultivated voice, the modest bright intelligence of words and mien and manner, the noble level of purpose, too simple and matter of course to be held forth or hidden, I behold a new revelation of the ways of God with His world. My Princess Pocahontas and her Young Brave are the strong, native, agile folk, nearer akin to earth. My daughter of the gods, divinely tall and most divinely fair, not only teaches, but is to them a word of the other world. When I look into her gentle face I marvel that she can dwell content in the wilderness, but she smiles back, not martyr wise, but amused, and says : “ Why, it is my life.”

And I mind me of one who made the self-same answer once upon a time, but to whom “ life ” meant the arrangement of dull hues and limp folds and lank outlines, and no hues are too dull, and no folds fall lankly enough to represent the meagre and awful shrinkage of that “ life ” before the eternal beauty and holiness of such consecration as this. We may differ regarding creeds and frankly admit “ the future all to us unknown,” but creeds and non-creeds recognize the nobleness of self-dedication to the service of humanity, and by that token humanity itself rises Godward.

The Creek lands adjoin those of the Cherokees. It is a charming drive thither. A bland and beautiful afternoon, a placid and smiling river, across which we are ferried to the climbing wooded bank beyond. It is true that, when we return, the ferryman will be drunk, relapsed into his surliest Indian mood, and unable or unwilling to ferry us across ; but we do not know it, and we shall not know it even when it happens, for the United States army will come down like the shepherd from the fold, with another wagon to the river bank, and, leaving ours on the further side for the night, will ferry over the wandering sheep with their own hands, under the weird light of flaring bonfires which they have kindled, and which set black river and sky, lurid green trees, and moving figures of men in the memory forever.

After prairie fires, the grass springs up again green and

smooth. In the woods the huge grapevines swing down like cables from the highest trees, and require much close observation and skill in the driver who would avoid them. Tree and sward and bank and bush are all alive with white and pink and purple bloom, which bee and bird have been swift to find ; so the fragrance is filled with music, too. It would be hard to recall a fairer landscape than that where Creek and Cherokee touch hands and lands. Nature here is gracious, and in the heart of civilization does not wear an aspect more soft and smiling. It is difficult to believe that we are not in a populous and cultivated country. The smooth, verdurous hills, level fields stretching afar ; here and there the roof of a cottage on a hillside or in a niche of the woods, fat cattle feeding tranquilly on the open plain, and resting content under clumps of shade ; here and there a group of traders on horseback, under picturesque broad-brimmed hats, chatting among the herd or meeting us four abreast where the kindly woods open wide enough, and over us the soft pink enchantment of the sunset sky, and the white and landless looks on with itching palms.

Our Creeks are less masterful than our Cherokees—less vindictive, too, I heard it said—more reticent and retiring, but equally cordial and hospitable. Equally equipped, also, I observe, with the *impedimenta* of civilized coat and collar, dolman and panier, and close-fitting kid gloves. Equally familiar with Indian and United States politics ; equally alive to the advantage of being an Indian if you must be in the Indian Territory ; equally shrewd to discern the power and property inherent in a four-foot fence well set with stake and rider ! All their appointments of house and garb, while simple, as must be in this frontier land, yet indicate easy circumstances, independence, cultivation.

I should say that the Cherokees hold themselves a little higher than the other Nations—the Bostonians of the Indian Territory—and that the other nations know it, half admit it, play upon it a little, but not resentfully. One Creek family was in great glee because their little Creek girl had carried off the honors of repartee at the Seminary. The teacher had put the question : which were the most advanced in learning and the arts of civilization. The Cherokee girls waited proudly for the only possible answer, “the Cherokees.” The Creek girls waited disdainfully, expecting the shot, but none the less ready to fight for their good

name. The little Creek paused a moment, securing vantage-ground, and then piped up blithely, "the Whites !" Creek and Cherokee "caught on," and joined in a hearty laugh, and thus the Indian Territory keeps step to the music of the Union, and woman's wit saves the day.

So sensible are these people of the importance of education that some of their best families, who are so remote or otherwise so circumstanced as to be unable to send their children to suitable schools, employ a governess at home. The best books are on their shelves and the second best, and what is this ? A huge volume of unmistakable antiquity—dark tinted, rough to the touch, smelling of the centuries ; perfect and matchless old English lettering. It is a Holy Bible of the time of Queen Elizabeth ! Massive, splendid, royal with the imprint of that last of the old-time Queens. Its title-page bears the verifying date of 1585, and Archbishop Cranmer furnishes the stately preface. It has, moreover, come down to these Creek Indians by lineal descent, in direct line, from the kith and kin of Washington ! The family record on its pages without a single break attests this fact, and ten chubby children playing on the grass bear the familiar names which every school history has made familiar from Maine to California, Archbishop Cranmer and Queen Elizabeth and George Washington saluting each other in a tepe. I do not believe even the poet's eyes of Mr. Tennyson beheld so rare a vision, so grand a manner, as this, when, upon shining fields, he saw

" The red man dance
By his red cedar-tree !"

It is the evening of Easter Sunday and the United States army invites me to go to church. I gladly accept, but in spite of Creek heredity and Choctaw civility, I have learned somewhat in my captivity that would incline me not to go under any less powerful escort.

"Is there really any danger ?" had been asked. "Cannot one go about here as freely as anywhere ?"

"Within this Fort," answered the Flag of my Country proudly, "your life is as safe as it is in Massachusetts. Outside of this Fort it is not—quite. That is all that can be said."

That I fear must be said. The Indians manifest no hostility to our Government—at least I found only the most friendly

eagerness toward it, a deprecation of its interference against the Indian autonomy, but rather too great an inclination to look to it for help to be quite consistent with entire Indian independence. The personal private relations of the surrounding Indians with the soldiers seems to be altogether and thoroughly friendly. The Indians seem to feel an assurance of the justice and of the intelligence of the soldier quite apart from their respect for him as representative of a power entirely capable of resenting and punishing an injury. Drunkenness is the only thing that a United States citizen among them need fear danger from, and even drunken, an Indian seldom fails to remember the majesty of United States law. His Honor the Mayor, for instance, is a martinet. He holds the law strict and stern over the evil and the good, and keeps "the town" in order. Except the prohibitory law. That defies his best efforts, and by hook or by crook the rivers run whiskey of the worst concoction. But His Honor the Mayor does not selfishly permit himself to be exempt from the penalty of the law whose violation he cannot prevent. He dooms himself to the drink which he cannot exclude. Under the spell of this illegal intruder he is currently reported to have slain five men, "and he is bringing up a family of boys the same way," says a peaceful woman with a sigh.

"Oh, no," interposes her husband, briskly; "they are under good discipline."

"Why, I heard they were desperately bad boys!"

"No, indeed! They behave very well. They have to. If they did not he would shoot them!"

Of course he keeps order in the town.

Yet, when suffering radically from violation of the prohibitory law, he still discerns the difference between an Indian citizen and a Federal soldier. One such, a belated Cromwellian Roundhead, shot all to pieces in the war of the rebellion, and as jolly and boyish as if his mother had tucked him up in bed every night of his life, had the misfortune to be unable to make his Honor understand that the latter had fixed too early a date for certain bids, and that his monetary interests were therefore not pressing, failed also to make him understand that the United States army chose not to bet with him a bottle of poison-whiskey that the Mayoral memory was correct, declined also to go out with him and buy and drink said whiskey in honor of a victory purely

phantasmic. Life had been laid low for less cause than this by that red-brown hand, but with a Soldier of the Legion his Honor inclined to mercy's side, and permitted himself to be coaxed out, harmless, into the dizzy air, upon the staggering earth, under the swimming sky.

The Doctor came in one day looking grave. His Honor the Mayor was very ill—of pneumonia. "Pneumonia, the scourge of the Indian Territory," my Lady Squaw admitted, though why, in that dry, warm, sunny air, I fail to see.

There was genuine sympathy at the Fort. His Honor, though his spiritual evolution was not yet complete, except in a frivolous sense of the word, had his trustworthy points. "He would give me his last penny if I were in trouble," said an appreciative soldier, who was sure never to be in that trouble. I followed his case with deep interest, trying even to peer into the next world, for what hope was there for him in this? What tireless, tender, intelligent nursing was there to hold him up against the onset of an insidious and terrible foe, and how much of being would wrench itself free when the foe had cloven these strong bonds of earth—falling back to earth. What could there be in the unseen world that this untutored soul should desire?

Nursing! One day he lay on the bed, with his boots on, one lung closed, the other clogged, panting for breath.

The second day he lounged on the piazza and had his bed made.

The third day he was at a cattle round-up!

I refused to believe he had been ill at all.

"He was ten times sicker than YOUR invalid!" vouched the United States army.

A naïve illustration of the respect in which the United States is held was offered at a trial in court. A year or two ago Sixkiller, Captain of the United States Indian Police, was shot and wounded by some young Cherokee braves in a fit of drunken revenge. The defense of the young men was that they thought they were just shooting at the Indian police! That Sixkiller was also a United States officer they did not know. Even this knowledge, however, I regret to say, did not suffice long to save his life, and this efficient Federal officer was last winter shot down and killed in cold blood for diligent performance of his duty.

But the chief danger to white visitors is from stray bullets,

and that is not large. Except for that it is also safe to take a lantern to light us through the thickets, swamps, and holes on the way back from church. It is but partly a joke that men dare not carry a lantern at night, because it affords a mark to shoot at ! It is but partly a joke that the Indian Territory goes to bed at candle-light for fear of shots being fired at lighted windows ! “Well,” said one, shamefacedly, after being well hunted down for the truth, there *was* awhile ago over at Tahlequah or Muscagee or somewhere—there was some trouble, and folks did not light up much for awhile, but I believe they have got over it now.”

I really fear that we shall be late to church !

GAIL HAMILTON.